



Is your child entering kindergarten?



Start Right— Start Healthy

A guide to health checkups for your new student



Information about what parents should expect from a well-child checkup is taken from *Recommended Children's Preventive Services: Ages Birth through 10 Years*, approved by the Washington State Board of Health in November 2000.

This brochure was written by the Washington State Board of Health and made available to other health organizations for printing and distribution.

Photography by Vonda Witley

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Children count on us for so much.

Now that your son or daughter is starting kindergarten, he or she will need your help in whole new ways. One of the most important things you can do is make sure your new student goes to class as healthy as possible—and that means taking him or her in for regular checkups.



Checkups are critical to your child's health. They give your doctor or other health-care provider a chance to:

- ◆ **Examine your child.**
- ◆ **Ask you questions and interact with your child.**
- ◆ **Keep your child's vaccines up to date.**
- ◆ **Discuss how you can keep your child safe and healthy.**

This brochure explains what to expect from a typical checkup for a child around the age of five. It is written as if a boy were going to be seen by a woman doctor, but your son's or daughter's checkup could also be performed by a nurse practitioner or a physician assistant. This brochure also suggests things you can do if you are not sure where to go for a checkup or how to pay for it.

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How to pay for your child's checkup

The Washington State Board of Health recommends that all children get the kind of checkup this brochure describes. If you have insurance, check with the company about what it covers. If you have trouble paying for health care, there may be ways to get help—

- ◆ **Free and low-cost insurance:** Health insurance helps kids stay healthy. But more than 100,000 kids in Washington don't have insurance. Many families don't realize their children may be able to get insurance from the state at little or no cost. Roughly 40 percent of all Washington children are eligible. Call toll-free 1-877-KIDS-NOW.
- ◆ **Community clinics:** Many communities have clinics that provide low-cost care on a sliding scale. Community clinics may be an option if your child has no insurance or if you're not able to afford the fee for an office visit. Call your local health department to find out more.

The nurse at your child's school or your local health department may be able to help you figure out how to pay for a checkup.

Why your child should have a "medical home"

Your child has a better chance of staying healthy if he has regular checkups with the same person. That person will get to know your family. Together you can create a healthy life for your child. If your child does develop health problems, chances are he'll get better care if one person treats him during his illness.

If you need help finding a doctor, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner to care for your child, your local health department may be able to help.

Health and Safety Advice

Exercise and diet: The habits your child learns now will affect him as an adult. Healthy food and regular activity can help your child:

- ◆ Grow properly
- ◆ Control his weight
- ◆ Feel better about himself
- ◆ Avoid health problems as an adult

Unfortunately, one in every 10 children in this country is overweight. Your doctor will discuss your child's diet and activities with you. She may recommend changes.

Safety: More children in this country die because of accidental injuries than for any other reason. Luckily, you can do a lot to help keep your child safe. We know that things such as bicycle helmets, car seats, and smoke detectors really do prevent injury and illness. Your doctor will talk to you about:

- ◆ Avoiding tobacco smoke
- ◆ Motor vehicle safety
- ◆ Bicycle safety
- ◆ Sport safety
- ◆ Preventing burns, falls, and water accidents
- ◆ Safe storage of dangerous items
- ◆ Poison prevention
- ◆ Gun safety
- ◆ Being prepared if your child stops breathing or chokes

Physical Exam

Your doctor will check for signs of health problems and take some measurements. She will probably:

- ◆ **Weigh and measure your child.** Measuring your child and putting the results on a chart gives your doctor information about how your child is growing.
- ◆ **Take your child's blood pressure.** Checking your child's blood pressure could detect problems. Early detection could protect your child from high blood pressure later.
- ◆ **Check your child's ability to see and hear.** Your doctor will check your children's eyes and ears. She will ask about signs that your child has eye or ear problems that



could make it harder for him to learn.

- ◆ **Check your child's mouth for dental problems.** Tooth decay is the most common ongoing health problem for children. Although not a dentist, your doctor will

examine your child's mouth and might refer you to a dentist.

Your doctor may choose to run some simple tests on your child's urine or blood.

Questions and Observations

Your doctor will need to know some basic things about your family's home life, your child's daily activities, and your family history. Your answers will tell her about things she should look for. She'll also watch how your child moves, speaks, responds to questions, and behaves.

From your answers and the things she sees, your doctor will learn about your child's:

- ◆ **Hearing and eyesight**
- ◆ **Movement skills**
- ◆ **Language skills**
- ◆ **Social skills**
- ◆ **Emotional skills**
- ◆ **Ability to take care of himself**

If she sees early signs of mental health and behavior problems, she might refer you to an expert.

Almost one in five children between the ages of six and 11 will

develop mental health problems. Early prevention efforts can make a big difference.



Vaccinations

Vaccines—or immunizations—are important ways to prevent illness and death. They have played a huge role in almost ending diseases that were once very common.



The Washington State Board of Health lists the immunizations that Washington children need. Schools require that new students prove they have had the immunizations on the list. (Parents who do not want their children immunized can sign a waiver.)

In Washington state, children are routinely immunized for:

- ◆ **Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis**
- ◆ **Polio**
- ◆ **Measles, Mumps, and Rubella**
- ◆ **Hepatitis B**
- ◆ **Haemophilus Influenza B**
- ◆ **Varicella**
- ◆ **Hepatitis A**

Your doctor may suggest you immunize your child against other diseases, such as the flu.

If your child needs an immunization, a nurse will probably give him a shot after you've seen the doctor.